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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the interactive relationship necessary between the university supervisor, the cooperating teacher in the public schools, and the student teacher in order for the student teaching practicum experience to succeed. This paper deals exclusively with the importance of the cooperating teacher in this partnership arrangement. Topics discussed include the importance of "site selection," traits of a good cooperating teacher, tasks that a cooperating teacher can have a student teacher accomplish early in the observation phase of student teaching before the students are released to the student teacher, suggestions for progressive assumption of responsibility of the students, and ways to prepare for the arrival of the student teacher. A practical checklist for cooperating teachers to use in evaluating the success of their influence on the student teachers is included. (Author/DF)

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THE STUDENT TEACHING PARTNERSHIP: COLLABORATION AND COLLEAGIALITY

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THE STUDENT TEACHING PARTNERSHIP: COLLABORATION AND COLLEAGIALITY

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Introduction

The student teaching experience can be a very rewarding experience for the young professional preparing to teach. It usually is the culminating activity as the student moves through the professional education block. In order for this experience to be self-fulfilling with few frustrations, it is imperative that a partnership be established between the university, the cooperating teacher within the public schools, and the student teacher. Remember the objective of student teaching is to prepare a young professional to enter the teaching profession not to create obstacles to impede them from entering the profession. In order for this experience to begin on a positive basis, thoughtful, discerning site selection is important.

Important Elements in Selection of Student Teaching Sites

Site selection should be done in a systematic, interactive manner. The prospective student teacher should be allowed input but in the final analysis a site should be selected in which the opportunity for a quality experience is the

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ultimate concern. Some important considerations when selecting a student teaching site include the following:

1. Are the programs in which the student teacher will be teaching comprehensive and challenging? You don't want the student teacher becoming involved in physical education programs that don't offer opportunities to expand and enrich the knowledge base of the student teacher. You want them to be challenged and stimulated by their experience.

2. Is there an emphasis on all aspects of the physical education curriculum including:

   a. team sports -
   b. individual and dual sports -
   c. fitness activities -
   d. recreational or transitional games -
   e. outdoor education -
   f. fitness testing -
   g. lifetime activities
   h. dance and rhythmic activities -
   i. gymnastics and tumbling activities -

3. Does the student teacher have the opportunity to implement the theory given them within their undergraduate major? Of course you as the advisor want to provide an opportunity for the student teacher to utilize the knowledge base gained through the course work within the physical education major. A good comprehensive program within the public schools will normally offer them this opportunity.

4. Are the facilities adequate to support a comprehensive program. Often times upon examination a curriculum looks complete but when comparing it to the facilities available, it is apparent that the facilities do not support the curriculum. Is it a 'paper curriculum' or a working curriculum?

5. Is the program oriented toward physical education as a legtimate academic unit or is it a program to prepare athletes for after school competition? It is absolutely imperative that the student teaching advisor investigates programs to ensure that the program actually gives the student teacher opportunities to present and teach varied activities. If the program is oriented only toward preparing students for athletic competition than student teachers in physical education should not be placed

in those programs.

6. Is there good discipline/classroom management within the classes and within the school? This is vital in allowing the student teacher to begin the student teaching experience on a positive basis with a greater chance of success.

7. Have the cooperating teachers had at least three years of experience? How can you provide insight into the teaching process if you are still in the learning stage yourself?

8. Does the cooperating teacher sincerely want to work with a student teacher or has the student teacher been forced upon the cooperating teacher by the administration? There should be some preliminary contract made by the student teaching advisor to ensure sincere desire to work with a student teacher.

9. Does the cooperating teacher, school, and district promote a professional environment? A situation where there is in-fighting, posturing, and a desire for personal promotion is a situation to avoid. It will only expose the student teacher to negatives and could be harmful.

In selecting the student teaching site, an important consideration that is integral to the success of the student teaching experience is the primary role model, the cooperating teacher. There exists specific traits that a university looks for in a good cooperating teacher. Some of these traits include:

1. The cooperating teacher both understands and can explain the basic goals of the university teacher education program. If the cooperating teacher does not understand nor care to understand the basic goals of the university teacher education program than they won't function as a team member.

2. The cooperating teacher can show evidence of continuing personal and professional development. If the cooperating teacher is going to emulate contemporary thinking in teacher education a continuing involvement in professional development needs to

be pursued.

3. The cooperating teacher accepts themselves as an 'autonomous' personality. They need to provide an example for the student teacher as an independent, thinking professional who function as an individual but also as a cooperative member of the team.

4. The cooperating teacher actively participates in at least one educational enterprise as a volunteer where voluntary participation is not a condition of employment.

5. The cooperating teacher is well-organized in the sense that papers, reports, schedules required by the university are followed in so all deadlines are met. This of course helps the university meet their time schedules.

6. The cooperating teacher can indicate a personal philosophy of teacher education that is well-thought out and relevant. If the cooperating teacher does not have a personal philosophy of teaching, it would be very difficult for them to assist the student teacher in developing one.

7. The cooperating teacher can specify at least five teaching behaviors expected of the student teacher. This of course provides specific behaviorial goals for the student teacher.

In addition to the traits universities look for in a cooperating teacher, most good cooperating teachers possess additional unique qualities. Some of these qualities include:

1. Knowledge of the subject matter that one is teaching.

2. Humanistic qualities - 'They care about kids'.

3. Diagnostic capabilities with the ability to analyze weaknesses in the student teacher and then to take the initiative to formulate corrective measures.

4. A genuine belief and an emphasis on planning. This is especially important for an inexperienced or beginnng teacher.

5. Good communication skills. A person who promotes 'open' channels of communication with the student teacher.

6. A person who promotes the 'professional qualities' of being a teacher.

7. A person who promotes active involvement in the profession of physical education.

If the university is able to identify an educator who possesses these qualities then usually that person would become a good cooperating teacher. Before the student teacher actually arrives on site there are some preliminary tasks the cooperating teacher should do to prepare for the arrival of the student teacher. Some of these tasks include:

1. To prepare the students for the arrival of the student teacher. Be sure they understand that this person will be functioning as a 'co-instructor' and not as an assistant to the teacher.

2. To have knowledge and understanding about the background of the student teacher.

3. To have read the university student teaching handbook, if one is available, and to understand the role of the cooperating teacher.

4. To have become aware of the legal status of student teachers in the state. This of course is to ensure protection for the student teacher but it also ensures protection for the cooperating teacher.

5. To have become familiar with the policy of the school concerning the responsibilities of student teachers within the structure of the school's operation.

6. To have had contact with the student teacher before they are on-site.

7. To have secured copies of materials that can be used in orienting the student teacher.

8. To have made provisions for the student teacher to have a desk and locker of their own. This is especially important in making them feel a part of the professional staff.

9. To have secured copies of the curriculum guide within the discipline area the student teacher is teaching, teacher's editions of textbooks, and a teacher's handbook.

10. To have tentatively planned the units the student teacher will teach during their student teaching experience. Of course this isn't finalized. It can be adjusted once the student teacher is on-site.

Once the student teacher arrives on-site there are certain courtesies that should be extended to make the student teacher feel comfortable. Some of these courtesies include welcoming the student teacher both publically and privately to make them feel apart of the team, personalizing the introduction to the students in order to specify the student teachers professional responsibilities. In addition the cooperating teacher should recognize the competency of the student teacher by finding out the student teachers strengths, major areas of study, past experiences, as well as unique skills. The cooperating teacher should indicate confidence in the student teacher. One way of accomplishing this is to introduce the student teacher to the students as a 'co-teacher' rather than a student teacher. In addition this introduction should be open-ended. The cooperating teacher should allow the student teacher the opportunity to address the class. The cooperating teacher could also give the class the opportunity to ask questions of the student

teacher.This helps reduce tension and establishes a mutual comfort zone.

In the initial days of student teaching, there should be some planned activities the student teacher can become involved in. This provides specific goals for the student teacher. It is more productive than simply having the student teacher observe. Some of these activities might include studying the children to identify unique characteristics, which students seem to respond to group activities better, or which children display physical or behaviorial disorders. There should be time provided to discuss the observations of the student teacher. In addition the student teacher could study the permanent records of the students looking for outstanding accomplishments, ages (especially children older or younger), number of children in the family unit, occupations of the parents, previous teacher's comments, or special problems that are evident. Of course this helps the student teacher become familiar with the children to assist them later in providing appropriate instructional techniques.

The student teacher might also study the physical and esthetic environment of the room or facility in which they will be teaching. Information such as locations of teaching stations, locations of entrances and exits, routes to the cafeteria, restrooms, drinking fountains, locker rooms, or outside areas will prove helpful. These are all important

and will affect the quality of classroom management techniques employed.

Finally an analysis of the 'routine' organization of the class would be helpful to the student teacher. Common tasks such as roll taking, organization of drills, techniques for administering discipline, organizational schemes for unique activities, as well as general methods or procedures employed by the cooperating teacher could be identified. Remember the cooperating teacher knows the students better than anyone. Therefore the student teacher would be wise to gain an insight into specific procedures employed by the cooperating teacher.

As the student teacher moves closer to assuming control of the class, a progressive release of control by the cooperating teacher should be followed. This contributes to establishing a comfort zone not only for the student teacher but also for the students. A few techniques that might be used to implement a progressive system of assuming responsibility include:

1. Cooperative planning. This allows the cooperating teacher to guide the student teacher and to provide relevant feedback as well as control over the activities that will be taught.

2. Team Teaching. When the student teacher initially teaches a lesson, a team approach might lessen the anxiety of both the student teacher as well as the cooperating teacher.

3. Sharing administrative responsibilities. Such items as filling out reports, lunch and playground supervision, directing homeroom activity or

attending faculty meetings should be done cooperatively. This will assist in giving the student teacher a feel for the periphery responsibilities of a teacher.

4. Assigning the student teacher tasks that illustrate the cooperating teachers confidence in the student teacher. The cooperating teacher should be continually striving to increase the confidence of the student teacher in the early days of the student teaching experience.

As this progressive exposure continues there are certain positive teaching behaviors that the cooperating teacher should attempt to develop. These teaching behaviors are directly related to success as a teacher. They include such qualities as an understanding and friendly approach to students. It is important that a teacher show genuine concern for students where a tolerance of errors is displayed. Remember in order to learn, students will make mistakes. A system of planning and the development of organizational skills is important also. This should be done in a consistent and thorough manner. An attempt by the cooperating teacher to promote creativity and imagination in the teaching methods of the student teacher is important. Monotony and dull routine are often times the biggest enemy of capturing and maintaining student interest. Inexperienced as well as experienced teachers should constantly strive to expand their creative talents. A mastery of the subject matter being taught is always important. Even though the content knowledge has been acquired through the undergraduate major the delivery of that content knowledge in a confident, professional manner

is a special skill that takes practice and feedback in order to perfect. Only sincere assistance and encouragement by the cooperating teacher will ensure success at developing this skill.

As this important relationship between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher develops, specifically what type of assistance do student teachers want from cooperating teachers. Some items often mentioned include:

1. More specific suggestions and 'constructive' feedback from the cooperating teacher. Without feedback that is well thought-out, improvement and skill development is going to be restricted.

2. An on-going analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the student teacher. The student teacher can than build on the strengths and attempt to minimize the weaknesses.

3. An examination into components of the discipline area being taught in which the student tacher has had little previous experience. This will help expand the knowledge base of the student teacher.

4. Suggestions on 'positive' ways to work with parents. This seems to be an area often neglected in the coursework of most teacher education programs.

5. An orientation into the administrative responsibilities of teaching. Again this area usually isn't covered sufficiently within the professional coursework prior to student teaching.

6. The location of supplementary materials. It is important to know where to go to locate supportive materials.

7. Specific suggestions in dealing with discipline concerns. This is the area that challenges student teachers the greatest. Techniques that have proven successful for the cooperating teacher in the past are usually accepted graciously by student teachers.

8. Opportunities to mingle with other faculty in order to develop the feeling of being a member of a professional team. This can be facilitated through planned activities initiated by the cooperating teacher.

In conclusion as an aid to assist cooperating teachers in providing insightful guidance in assisting student teachers to develop the necessary skills to succeed as a professional educator, the following self-evaluation checklist might prove helpful. The cooperating teacher should use this checklist in an introspective manner to help decide if they are providing proper guidance toward the overall development of the student teacher.

Self-Evaluation Checklist

1. Do I check lesson plans?
2. Do I watch the lesson being taught?
3. What are my specific suggestions for the lesson being taught?
4. What are the strengths of the student teacher?
5. What are the weaknesses of the student teacher and how can they be corrected?
6. Do I have a reasonable timetable for the release of responsibilities to the student teacher and have I shared this timetable with the student teacher?
7. Have I helped the student teacher become acquainted with other members of the faculty?
8. Have I helped the student teacher become oriented to the community?
9. Am I accessible to the student teacher?
10. Do I provide specific feedback to the student teacher?
11. Do I provide specific feedback to the university

supervisor?

12. Do I identify the weaknesses of the student teacher in a non-threatening way?

13. Am I a good role model for the student teacher?

14. Is the student teacher developing the necessary teaching skills to function independently as a professional?

15. Do I enjoy working with the student teacher? Has it been a positive experience for me?